

CORK ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY

Founded in 1938 by Aloys Fleischmann (1910-1992)

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CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Prepared for the 2015 Annual General Meeting of Cork Orchestral Society

Thursday 24 September 2015

The 2014 – 15 season was the second year under the current team. We have been working well together and the number of volunteers to help with concerts has grown in that time.

We carried out a membership survey in August 2014 to gauge the satisfaction of members, what they would like to see in future seasons and any concerns they might have. This impacted on last year's programming, including the Forte Festival, as well as this forthcoming season. In particular, the inclusion of the Irish Chamber Orchestra was something that many members wanted to see, so that is something we have prioritised. We are excited to be presenting a very large concert from them in December which will include their principal artistic partner, Jorg Widmann. I have included as handouts outlines of some of the key points from the survey one page demonstrating the wide support for the society 'as is', and one showing the concerns that were raised and how they are being addressed.

The 2014 – 15 season saw some wonderful music and artists and plenty of great experiences for concert goers. We took a couple of 'hits' that affected our out turn figures negatively. Attendance, as ever, fluctuated but our use of the Cork Opera House's Half Moon Theatre for what was a very wonderful and packed children's concert, was one thing that cost us significantly. The use of the venue was necessitated by a misbooking from our end of the Curtis Auditorium, and adding further to the costs it was late in the day when we discovered that the 12-piece ensemble required a grand piano which had to be hired in. This highlights the great value of the Curtis Auditorium to us!

We have also examined the figures over several years of the Vanbrugh Quartet's concerts in the Aula Maxima and we are consistently seeing poor income from these concerts which are relatively costly from our point of view. For the 2015 – 16 season we have moved these concerts to the Curtis Auditorium and we very much hope to see improved attendance there as under the current figures the concerts are quite unsustainable. At this meeting last year it was agreed that our continued support of the Vanbrugh Quartet was a priority for members; it is important that our members demonstrate their commitment by turning up for their concerts!

We held our first city wide festival, Forte Festival, in March. This venture was made possible by the opportunity to host at quite a low cost two excellent national ensembles, the Irish Chamber Orchestra and the Irish Baroque Orchestra Chamber Soloists in one weekend. We set out with the aim of raising the profile of the society on a general level, as well as giving our regular audience the opportunity to enjoy a festival experience of classical music locally. We were very successful in gaining sustained media attention, and the 'pop up performances' certainly helped us reach new audiences. I have included as a handout some of the feedback we received. The festival was an enormous amount of work, and while some events were very well attended a couple let us down and meant that we did not break even as expected. That said, the loss was relatively small and the festival did a lot for us

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making it, we believe, money well spent. Given our limited administrative resources we are considering a repeat of the festival but perhaps making it a bi-annual festival. We have no plans to run the festival in 2016 but are considering a reprise in 2017.

The board met with Niall Doyle, the new head of music at the Arts Council at the end of last month. Everything indicates that he can be a strong ally for us in Merrion Square. He is very appreciative of the work that the society does, its history and the strength of its membership. Our main purpose in meeting with him was to prepare the ground for a request in increased funding in order to allow us to hire a part time administrator, something that most similar organisations in the country already have. He was of the opinion that this would be a reasonable and well-founded request and is something we should keep working on. A request for said funding for an administrator will be part of our upcoming funding application (which would apply to the year 2016) but we do not expect success in the first year. We are very glad, however, to have the services of a part time administrator for the coming season through an employment scheme. Paul Veale, who first came on board with us as a volunteer for the Forte Festival, was a great help in the run up to the festival and we are delighted to have his services for nineteen hours a week for the coming year. Paul's involvement means that, for the first time, we can be contactable by telephone!

Last year we instigated an artistic advisory panel to help inform the programming of concerts. This venture had limited benefits due to the difficulty in coordinating members and the need for fast turnaround in time for funding applications. The members survey, however, provided a useful resource for programming as mentioned earlier.

Allin Gray has advised us that he will be stepping down as Treasurer for the society, although he will stay on as Treasurer for the company board. This does not come as a surprise as he had signalled at the outset that he would be prepared to be involved for the first years of the new team to help get our systems in place. It's appropriate here to mention that he has done a truly excellent job, enabling us to learn from our figures as well as to fulfil transparency requirements for our funders. Allin has generously offered to be available in a consultative and mentoring role for the new treasurer to help us make another smooth transition. We have advertised the position with the Cork Volunteer Centre and have received one expression of interest so far, from an experienced accountant. If you would like to see a description of the role copies are available at the top of the room.

Please do contact us if you would like to be more involved with the society. Thanks to everyone currently involved *particularly the committee* who contributed so much over the past year. There is no doubt that we will always need help filling in gaps as people's availability changes and also perhaps in new roles. Could really benefit from help coordinating promotional activity. And perhaps some kind of social secretary helping with the extra musical elements of events catering for receptions or pre-concert talks that might offer an extra incentive to audience to attend more regularly.

Nicki ffrench Davis
Chairperson
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